close your eyes, i'll be here in the mornin'

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/52738483.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter
Additional Tags:	Inspired by Brokeback Mountain, Alternate Universe - Brokeback Mountain Fusion, Southern Will Graham, Young Will Graham, Young Hannibal Lecter, Friends to Lovers, Romantic Friendship, Fluff, Falling In Love, Implied Sexual Content, Idiots in Love, Tenderness, Protective Will Graham, Soft Hannibal Lecter, Title from a Country Song, Will is Jack Twist, Hannibal is Ennis Delmar, Kissing, Happy Ending, Denial of Feelings, Sexual Tension, Warm and Fuzzy Feelings, Vulnerable Hannibal Lecter, Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, Will Graham Loves Hannibal Lecter, Not Canon Compliant
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of bambbii44's hannibal cowboy au
Stats:	Published: 2024-01-02 Words: 12,575 Chapters: 1/1

close your eyes, i’ll be here in the mornin’

by bambbii44

Summary

Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter are both 19 year old boys looking for a summer job in Wyoming. They are tasked with the responsibility of sheep herding, and neither of them know just how fond of each other they're going to become in the coming weeks.
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A Hannigram fic inspired by Brokeback Mountain with a happy ending. <3

Notes

This is a birthday gift for my amazing friend who wanted me to write a Brokeback Mountain oneshot au. :3 I hope anyone who reads enjoys it as well! <3

The year was 1963, and the Wyoming sky stretched out above in a brilliant canvas of sunny hues. Will Graham bounded out of his beat-up truck. The dusty dirt crunched beneath his boots as he made his way to the trailer, his eyes squinting against the bright sunlight.

The door slammed shut behind him, echoing his frustration. Summer job as a sheep herder — not exactly the glamorous gig he had in mind for the break. Kicking pebbles around in mild aggravation, Will paced in silence, lost in his own thoughts. It was one of those days when everything seemed to be rubbing him the wrong way.

Then, out of the blue, there he was — another boy, about the same age, leaning casually against the trailer wall. Will shot him a look, hands on hips, ready to size up the competition. The stranger averted his gaze, shoving his hands deeper into his pockets. Despite the awkwardness, there was something about him — something that sparked a warmth in Will's chest.

Intrigued, Will walked closer, tilting his head as he continued to study the boy. The stranger seemed to retreat, avoiding eye contact like it was going out of style. Will, undeterred, went back to lean against his truck. His gaze lingered on the mysterious boy, unable to tear away even though he knew he was probably creeping the guy out.

Fixing his hair in the side mirror, Will stole glances at the stranger who had now taken a seat on the worn wooden stairs. There was an undeniable magnetic pull, a curiosity that refused to be ignored. The sun bathed everything in a golden glow, and in that moment, amidst the pebbles and the dust, Will found himself captivated by the boy on the wooden stairs.

Will’s eyes darted towards the sound of an approaching truck. The engine growled and rumbled, and he shot up from his leaning spot, eyes locking onto the mystery boy who mirrored his alertness.

The truck slid into the pebbled ground, and a burly figure stepped out. Will's eyebrows furrowed as he assumed this must be their new boss, the purveyor of summer sheep herding gigs. The man paid them no mind, striding purposefully towards the trailer, clutching papers in his hand like they held the secrets to the universe.

Will couldn't help but scoff, shaking his head at the man's disregard for common decency. The mystery boy, perhaps sensing an opportunity, started to follow the boss towards the trailer. But fate, it seemed, had other plans. The trailer door swung shut with an ominous creak, slamming right in the face of the eager follower.

Will's lips curled into a wry grin as he watched the boy's futile attempt to get inside. A small chuckle escaped him, the sound blending with the soft shuffle of the boy's footsteps against the ground. It was almost comical, the way the door shut him out.

Shifting his weight from foot to foot, Will listened to the slow, deliberate pacing of the stranded boy. The anticipation hung in the air, a mix of curiosity and amusement. It was as if the trailer door held the key to their summer destinies, and the boy was determined to unlock it, even if it meant pacing in circles until he wore a hole in the ground.

Then, with an abruptness that startled both Will and the mystery boy, the trailer door shot open. The giant of a man loomed in the doorway, filling the frame like a hulking guardian of employment opportunities. The big man's voice echoed, breaking the tense silence.

"If you boys want jobs," he boomed, a gruff edge to his tone, "you better get your scrawny asses in here pronto!"

Will arched an eyebrow at the choice of words, exchanging a one sided bemused glance with the mystery boy. It seemed their introduction to the world of sheep herding was going to be as rough and rugged as the Wyoming landscape that surrounded them. With a shared shrug, the two boys exchanged nods and hurried towards the beckoning trailer, ready for whatever the summer had in store for their scrawny asses.

Inside the trailer, Will and the mystery boy clambered in, their eyes meeting only briefly before shifting to the imposing figure of their would-be boss. The man eyed them with a scrutinizing gaze, making the silence in the confined space even more palpable. The air seemed to hum with anticipation as the man, with a thick Southern accent, began to lay down the law.

"Alright, listen up, boys," the man rumbled, his voice commanding attention. "I need me a camp tender. That means you, scrawny fella, will be responsible for settin' up camp, keepin' things in order, and makin' sure the whole operation runs smoother than a buttered-up slide."

Will exchanged a quick glance with the mystery boy, their eyes conveying a silent acknowledgment of the shared fate they now faced. The man continued, his words like gravel underfoot, "Now, for the herder position. You," he pointed at Will, "you're the herder. Your job is to keep a keen eye on them sheep, day and night. You sleep up there with 'em on that mountain, a hundred percent commitment. Roll up that tent every mornin', and don't you forget it."

Nodding in understanding, Will took mental notes, preparing himself for the challenges of a summer spent among the woolly wanderers. The phone's sudden ring disrupted the air, causing both boys to shift uncomfortably on their feet, eyes suddenly glued to the floor. A shared awkwardness settled in the cramped space.

The man barked into the phone, his words laced with colorful curses that painted a vivid picture of his frustration. Hanging up with a decisive slam, he turned his attention back to the boys. “Fuckin’ idiots," he muttered under his breath, shaking his head as if to rid himself of the annoyance.

His gaze landed on Will, and a warning laced his words like barbed wire. "You," he jabbed a finger at Will, "last year, we lost some damn sheep. I ain't toleratin' that nonsense this time around. Keep 'em in line, you hear me?"

Will grinned confidently, determined to prove himself. "Got it, boss."

The man's attention then shifted to the mystery boy, his tone less stern but no less commanding. "As for you, kid," he tossed an object towards the boy, who fumbled to catch it. "Friday, you head down to the bridge for groceries. Don't mess it up."

The man pulled a cigarette from a crumpled pack, lighting it with a practiced hand as he eyed the boys. Will followed the mystery boy as he made his way out of the trailer, the door creaking shut behind them.

Will reached for the pack of cigarettes in his pocket. With a practiced flick, he ignited the tip, taking a deep drag as he surveyed the expanse before him.

The mystery boy followed suit. Will shot him a sidelong glance, a mischievous grin playing on his lips. "Name's Will Graham," he declared, offering his hand in greeting.

The boy looked at Will's hand for a moment before extending his own. A firm handshake ensued, and the boy spoke with an accent that danced in the air like an unfamiliar melody. "Hannibal." Will liked it. A lot.

"Hannibal, huh?" Will raised an eyebrow, a teasing glint in his eye. "Just Hannibal? No last name?"

The boy, now identified as Hannibal, didn't crack a smile. His gaze held a certain intensity that made Will's teasing lose a bit of its edge. "Lecter," he replied, the single word carrying a weight that demanded attention.

Will couldn't help but appreciate the uniqueness of the name. "Hannibal Lecter, huh?" he mused, the words rolling off his tongue with a touch of his own Southern drawl. "Well, ain't that a fancy name for a sheep herder."

Hannibal's expression remained stoic, and Will couldn't quite read him. The silence lingered for a beat before Will decided to break it. "Nice to meet you, Hannibal Lecter."

Hannibal offered a simple nod in response, his demeanor unfazed. As they stood there, the wind playing with the tendrils of smoke that curled around them, Will couldn't help but feel a sense of excitement.

The dim light of the bar enveloped Will and Hannibal as they sat at the worn-out counter, nursing their respective bottles. Will took a swig of his beer, the amber liquid offering a momentary reprieve from the summer heat. Hannibal, on the other hand, cradled his bottle between his hands, his gaze fixated on the table as if searching for answers in the wood grain.

Will watched him for a moment before deciding to break the silence. "You know, Hannibal, I ain't exactly thrilled about babysittin' a bunch of dumb sheep all summer, but it's gotta be better than workin' for my old man."

Hannibal's eyes flickered, acknowledging Will's words without lifting his gaze. Will chuckled, taking another sip of his beer. "My old man, he's a real piece of work. Can never please the man, no matter what I do. That's why I took to rodeoing. Figured maybe I could earn some respect out there, you know?"

He grinned at Hannibal, a mischievous glint in his eye. "Ever done any rodeoing, Lecter?"

Hannibal's gaze shifted, his eyes avoiding Will's direct stare. "No," he replied, his voice measured.

Will leaned back, one arm draped over the back of his chair. "You're missin' out, my friend. The adrenaline, the crowd, the thrill of stayin' on a buckin' bull for eight seconds — it's somethin' else."

A beat of silence hung between them before Will, ever the curious conversationalist, probed further. "So, Hannibal, you from out of America or somethin'?"

Hannibal nodded, his eyes still fixed on the table. "I was."

Will raised an eyebrow, sensing a tale worth hearing. "Your folks run you off or somethin'?"

Hannibal shook his head, a hint of sadness in his eyes. "They died."

Will blinked, the weight of the revelation settling between them. He fidgeted with his lighter, the metal clicking softly in the quiet bar. "Damn, Lecter, I'm sorry to hear that."

Hannibal shrugged, a nonchalant gesture that belied the complexity of his emotions. "It happens."

Will took another swig of his beer, the cool bitterness a welcome distraction. He leaned back, deciding it was time to let the conversation ebb away for a bit.

The sun beat down on the vast expanse of land as Will and Hannibal worked on getting their horses ready around the flock of sheep. The incessant bleating of the woolly creatures grated on Will's nerves, the sound echoing through the open landscape.

"Damn sheep never shut up, do they?" Will grumbled, adjusting the saddle on his horse.

Hannibal, focused on a knot, responded with a subtle nod, his hands deftly working the rope. The grocery man approached, a weathered hat shading his eyes as he squinted at Hannibal. "Remember, no ordering soup."

Hannibal met the man's gaze, his reply succinct. "I do not eat soup."

Will, overhearing the exchange, couldn't help but chuckle. "No soup for you, huh, Lecter?"

Hannibal shot him a dry look.

Mounting his horse, Will rode around the flock, the dust kicking up beneath the hooves. Hannibal continued fussing with knots, his attention focused on the task at hand.

"Your horse," Hannibal finally spoke, "has a low startle point."

Will laughed, a hearty sound that echoed across the plains. "No filly could throw me, Lecter. I've got a firm grip."

Hannibal glanced up, his expression deadpan. "We will see about that."

Undeterred, Will grinned and gestured toward the flock. "Let's get goin', unless you want to spend all day tyin' knots."

Hannibal shot him an annoyed glare, his hands pausing in their meticulous work

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The mountains stretched out before Will and Hannibal, a majestic landscape of sunlit trees and rugged rocks. The air was crisp, carrying with it the scent of pine and adventure as the two men rode through the wilderness, herding a flock of sheep along the narrow trails.

The sun dappled through the leaves, creating a patchwork of light and shadow on the ground. Will's horse navigated the uneven terrain with ease, the rhythmic clopping of hooves echoing against the mountainside. He looked around, the sheer beauty of the surroundings momentarily distracting him from the task at hand.

Hannibal, riding a few paces behind, had a small sack attached to his horse. Will squinted, a grin forming on his face as he realized it held a baby sheep. The little creature poked its head out curiously, eyes wide and innocent, as it swung gently in the makeshift sling. Will chuckled at the sight.

The trail led them deeper into the heart of the mountains, the landscape evolving with each turn. Rocky outcrops and towering trees gave way to a narrow path bordered by wildflowers. The sheep bleated contentedly, their woolly forms blending with the natural hues of the wilderness.

As they descended into a small valley, a babbling creek appeared, cutting through the landscape like a liquid ribbon. Will guided his horse towards the water, the sound of rushing water growing louder with each step. The creek glistened in the sunlight, a clear and inviting oasis amidst the rugged terrain.

Reaching down, Will scooped up a handful of the cool water, letting it slip through his fingers. The reflections of the sun danced on the surface, creating a mesmerizing play of light and shadow. He marveled at the simple beauty of the moment, the serenity of the creek a stark contrast to the lively chaos of the sheep.

Hannibal, too, guided his horse to the creek, the baby sheep in tow. The little creature seemed unfazed by the change in scenery, its eyes reflecting the same curiosity that Will felt in his own chest.

Hannibal found himself ensnared in a web of conflicting emotions. The echoes of the past reverberated in his mind as he watched Will, a young boy with unruly curls and piercing blue eyes, setting up camp on the mountain.

From the moment Hannibal laid eyes on Will, he sensed an inevitable clash of personalities. Will was loud, impolite, and carried an air of unruliness that clashed with Hannibal's usual preference for quiet and order. The initial impression marked Will as someone Hannibal wouldn't easily get along with.

Hannibal's gaze, however, betrayed the internal struggle within him. Despite his reservations, his eyes involuntarily gravitated toward Will's features. There was an undeniable allure in the unruly curls that framed Will's face and the intensity of those piercing blue eyes that seemed to hold secrets untold.

Those eyes, Hannibal mused, were a dangerous territory for his stoic heart. He knew he must avert his gaze, for the feelings they kindled were unfamiliar and unwelcome. The magnetic pull of Will's presence left Hannibal grappling with an internal conflict he had never experienced before.

Amidst the silence that settled between them, Hannibal found himself missing the cacophony of Will's loud yelling and the animated stories that seemed to punctuate every moment. The absence of Will's exuberance left a void, a silence that Hannibal could not bring himself to break.

The memory of their initial encounters played out like a silent film in Hannibal's mind, capturing the nuances of their dynamic. Despite the seemingly irreconcilable differences, there was an unspoken connection, an invisible thread that pulled Hannibal's attention back to Will, like a moth drawn to the flame.

As Hannibal continued to observe Will from a distance, a part of him yearned for the noisy banter and unrestrained laughter that characterized Will's presence. The silence between them, though seemingly deliberate on Hannibal's part, held the weight of unspoken words and unexplored territories.

The mountain stood tall and proud, its silhouette outlined against the deepening hues of the evening sky. The sun had long dipped below the horizon, leaving behind a canvas of stars that flickered like distant campfires in the vast night sky.

Will sat beside his small tent, perched on the mountainside overlooking the sheep. The quiet hum of nature enveloped him — the rustle of leaves, the distant call of an owl, and the soft bleating of the sheep huddled together for the night. The air was cool, carrying with it the scent of pine and earth, a fragrant reminder of the untamed wilderness.

Having spent the day setting up camp with Hannibal, not a word had passed between them. Yet, as Will sat there in the stillness of the mountain, he felt a connection, an invisible thread that bound him to the mysterious boy with whom he shared this solitary venture.

The tent beside him cast a gentle shadow on the ground, its silhouette merging with the dark outlines of the rocks and trees. Will's knees were drawn up, a cigarette dangling between his fingers. He brought it to his lips, the ember casting a soft glow on his face as he took a contemplative drag.

His mind wandered, drifting into the realm of thoughts that seemed to have no fixed destination. He thought about the day — the rhythmic clatter of stakes being driven into the ground, the meticulous arrangement of supplies, and the shared silence between him and Hannibal. There was a strange comfort in the absence of words, a companionship that transcended the need for constant chatter.

As the cigarette burned down, Will found himself missing the silent and occasionally annoyed company of his newfound friend. There was something intriguing about Hannibal, something that pulled at the edges of Will's consciousness in a way he couldn't quite explain. It was as if the mountains themselves whispered secrets that only the two of them shared.

Will's thoughts meandered to the features that made Hannibal distinctive — those mysterious dark eyes that seemed to hold a universe of untold stories and the soft blonde hair that framed his face. The more Will pondered, the more he realized that the quiet boy had become an unexpected focal point.

Glancing towards the mountain, Will furrowed his brows. In the distance, the little light of Hannibal's campfire flickered like a solitary star against the dark expanse. The fire seemed to dance to the rhythm of his heart, a distant beacon in the vastness of the night.

The flickering flames danced in the quietude of the night as Hannibal sat alone at the camp. The glow of the fire cast shadows on his contemplative face, an unwitting witness to the silent turmoil within.

His gaze, like an unspoken yearning, shifted in the direction of Will. The boy he had initially deemed incompatible, loud, impolite, and irreverent, had woven himself into the fabric of Hannibal's thoughts, an unwelcome intruder in the sanctuary of his guarded heart.

A traitorous pang echoed through Hannibal's chest, a subtle whisper of emotions that defied his rationality. His heart, like an insubordinate accomplice, grew more and more fond of the boisterous, curly-haired beauty named Will Graham.

In the solitude of the mountains, Hannibal's mind wandered to the hypothetical scene where Will, undoubtedly, grumbled and complained about the sheep. The mental image, far from exasperating, brought an involuntary smile to Hannibal's lips. The thought of Will's animated grievances infused a warmth into the chilled air around him.

Yet, Hannibal was acutely aware of the dangerous territory he treaded. His heart, once shielded by the impenetrable armor of detachment, found itself vulnerable in the face of Will. The uncharted territories of affection were fraught with the risk of loss and heartbreak—two unwelcome companions that had haunted Hannibal's past.

As the night enveloped the mountains in its serene embrace, Hannibal grappled with the silent revolution within him. The walls he had erected, the barriers he had fortified over years of self-preservation, were now showing signs of cracks. Will, with his irrepressible spirit and magnetic presence, had become an anomaly Hannibal couldn't rationalize or dismiss.

His heart, stubbornly rebellious, defied the logic Hannibal sought to impose.

Will yawned, stretching his arms as he plopped down beside Hannibal, who was already at work on the makeshift stove.

"Mornin'," Will mumbled, rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand.

Hannibal nodded in acknowledgment, the sizzle of beans filling the morning air. Will eyed the breakfast preparations with a mixture of hunger and impatience. "Can't wait till I got enough money to not put up with this crap anymore," he grumbled.

Hannibal's response was a simple nod, his focus on the food. Will's irritation, however, simmered beneath the surface. "I mean, seriously," he continued, "making me stay with the sheep? It's pure bullshit. Ain't right, it's against the rules or somethin'."

Hannibal remained silent, his attention on the cooking. Will's gaze wandered, studying the brim of Hannibal's cowboy hat, annoyance bubbling within him. "Why do you always wear that damn thing so low?" Will asked, as if the hat itself was a personal affront.

Hannibal spared him a glance, his dark eyes briefly meeting Will's. But the hat remained a steadfast barrier, shrouding the mystery beneath. Will huffed, muttering under his breath about cowboy hats and boss-imposed sheep-sitting duties.

The aroma of breakfast filled the campsite, a tempting distraction from Will's grumblings

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The following day found Will reclined against a rough-hewn rock on the mountain, aching back protesting the discomfort of sleeping in a tent that offered more bumps than cushioning. Will sighed, his eyes squinting against the brightness as he surveyed the flock of sheep scattered across the terrain.

His gaze shifted to the side, catching sight of a lone coyote meandering not too far away. A sharp intake of breath and Will's hand instinctively reached for the shotgun nestled beside him. The chill of the metal against his palm brought a sense of urgency as he aimed, narrowing his eyes at the predator.

The quiet mountainside held its breath as Will took careful aim, his finger hovering over the trigger. A split second later, the shotgun echoed through the air, the blast reverberating against the rocks. Will's eyes widened in frustration as the coyote, unscathed, darted away into the wilderness. A stream of curses escaped his lips.

"Damn it!" he muttered, the echo of his frustration fading into the mountain air. The failed attempt at deterring the coyote left a sour taste, compounded by the ache in his back and the weight of a restless night.

Will's thoughts drifted to the campsite below, wondering what Hannibal was up to all alone. Probably brooding, he mused, picturing the stoic figure amid the quiet of the campfire. The

mountainside felt both vast and lonely, a stark contrast to the camaraderie he'd come to appreciate, albeit in silence, with Hannibal.

The sun, a warm caress against Hannibal's skin, painted the landscape with hues of gold as he rode back to camp on his horse. The trees whispered secrets, and the grass swayed beneath him, a picturesque tableau that belied the turmoil within Hannibal's mind.

Lost in the tranquil beauty of the scenery, Hannibal's thoughts drifted to Mischa, a specter that haunted the recesses of his memories. He imagined how she would have reveled in the vastness of the Wyoming wilderness, her laughter echoing through the mountains like a melody lost to time.

However, the idyllic moment shattered as Hannibal's horse skittered in response to a primal growl. The sudden eruption of chaos sent Hannibal sprawling to the ground, the pain in his head momentarily eclipsed by the urgency to regain control.

Ignoring the blood that trickled down his forehead, Hannibal scrambled to his feet, his Lithuanian curses punctuating the air as he chased after the mules. The Wyoming landscape, once a tranquil haven, became a battleground where the wild and the untamed clashed in a cacophony of growls and yells.

Breathless and bloodied, Hannibal fought to regain control, but the mules eluded him, disappearing into the wilderness. Panic gripped his heart at the thought of Will stranded without provisions, forced to ration their meager supplies.

A surge of determination replaced fear as Hannibal steeled himself. He wanted to run to Will, to assure him that he would hunt and gather, ensuring they wouldn't face starvation. The instinct to protect and provide overrode the logical detachment he so often sought.

Yet, in that vulnerable moment, an unbidden comparison surfaced. The dangerous parallels drawn between Mischa and Will threatened to unravel the carefully compartmentalized emotions within Hannibal.

Taking a deep breath, Hannibal shut down the tumultuous sea of emotions, his curses fading into silence. The pragmatic survivalist within him rose to the fore, pushing aside the vulnerability that threatened to seep through the cracks.

With an almost mechanical precision, Hannibal composed himself, determined to return to camp.

The sun dipped below the rugged peaks, casting long shadows across the campsite as Will returned from his watch on the mountain. His steps slowed, and a furrow creased his brow as he scanned the camp for any sign of Hannibal. The quiet crackle of the fading campfire was the only greeting that met his ears.

"Hey, Lecter!" Will called, the echo of his own voice reverberating through the stillness of the mountain.

No response.

A sense of unease settled over Will as he circled, eyes darting between the tents and the surrounding wilderness. "Lecter, where the hell are you?" he muttered, the landscape refusing to divulge any clues.

Panic crept into Will's chest, tightening like a vice. He called out again, the mountains seemingly swallowing his words. "Hannibal!"

His own restlessness escalated as he considered the possibilities. What if Hannibal got hurt somewhere, hidden from view? What if he needed help? Will's mind painted vivid scenarios of his newfound companion lying injured in the mountains, the images fueling the jittery unease that coursed through his veins.

Biting his lip, Will debated his next move. Should he go looking for Hannibal now, as the fading light made the search more challenging? Or should he wait until nightfall, when the darkness could cloak any missteps in the pursuit?

The seconds ticked by, each one amplifying the silence around him. Will's heart raced as his imagination conjured the worst scenarios — Hannibal, lifeless in some remote corner of the mountains, or worse, injured and unable to walk.

"Damn it," Will cursed under his breath, his hands fidgeting nervously. The urge to act clawed at him, but a voice in his head argued that Hannibal was perfectly capable of taking care of himself.

With a deep breath, Will tried to steady his racing heart. The mountains, though imposing, were not unfamiliar territory for Hannibal. He chided himself for giving in to the anxiety that threatened to consume him.

"He's fine," Will muttered, a self-assuring mantra, as he forced himself to wait until nightfall. The sun sank lower, casting long shadows that played tricks on the mind.

Will sat by the dwindling campfire, nursing a bottle of whiskey. The rhythmic crackling of the flames provided a comforting backdrop to the solitary moment.

In the quiet solitude, the distant clip-clop of horse hooves stirred Will from his whiskey-induced reverie. His senses sharpened, and he shot up, the bottle clutched tightly in his hand. The approaching figure revealed itself in the dim light, and a wave of relief washed over Will as he recognized Hannibal on horseback.

He squinted, his brow furrowing as he took in the sight of Hannibal's figure emerging from the shadows. The relief, however, was overshadowed by a simmering frustration that bubbled to the surface. "Where the hell have you been?" Will demanded, his words tinged with a mixture of annoyance and genuine concern.

Hannibal dismounted, his movements deliberate as he tethered the horse. Will couldn't help but feel the familiar pull, the desire to wrap Hannibal in his arms and reassure himself that he was okay. Instead, he took a swig of whiskey, letting the burn of alcohol momentarily distract him from the whirlwind of emotions.

"I was hungry," Will complained, gesturing to the meager campfire offerings. "All I found were damn beans."

Ignoring Will's grievances, Hannibal shot him a sidelong glance, his expression unreadable. As he walked past, a glint of red caught Will's eye. He frowned, the haze of whiskey momentarily lifting as he saw blood streaked across Hannibal's forehead.

"What happened?" Will asked, the concern cutting through his irritation.

Hannibal settled onto a log by the fire, his voice calm as he explained, "I found a bear. The horses got scared, the mules ran."

Will scoffed, dismissive. "Don't care about the damn mules. What about you?" He looked at Hannibal's bloodied face, the desire to help burning beneath his skin.

Hannibal glanced away, the flickering firelight casting shadows on his features. "It is just a scratch."

Will's eyes narrowed. "Looks more than a scratch to me."

He grabbed a canteen and offered it to Hannibal. The bottle exchanged hands, and Will watched intently as Hannibal took a long swig. The silence lingered, tension palpable in the air as Will's concern battled with the restraint he imposed upon himself.

Finally relenting, Will untied the bandanna from around his neck. He dipped it into the pot of boiling water hanging above the fire, the steam rising as he soaked the cloth. With a tender touch, he approached Hannibal, who sat with a stoic expression.

"Hold still," Will murmured, his voice soft as he began to clean the blood from Hannibal's wound. Hannibal muttered a protest, but Will shushed him gently, the touch of the damp cloth soothing against the abrasion.

The fire crackled, casting a warm glow on the scene unfolding. Will's hands moved with care, his focus solely on the task at hand. He cleaned the wound methodically, the connection between them intensifying with each passing moment.

"I'll shoot one of the sheep for food," Will declared, breaking the silence. Hannibal's eyes met his, the firelight reflecting in their depths. "Our boss can find out for all I care. There's a thousand of them."

Hannibal remained silent, his gaze steady. Will's eyes, however, lingered on the wound he cleaned, the understanding between them reaching depths that words couldn't capture.

The night draped itself over Hannibal's solitary figure as he lay in his tent, the ambient glow of the fire casting flickering shadows on the fabric. In his hands, he cradled Will's blood-stained bandana, a tangible reminder of the events that had unfolded.

The silence of the night was broken only by the soft rustling of leaves, and as Hannibal closed his eyes, a rush of memories flooded his mind. Will's hands, tender and caring, had touched Hannibal's wounds with a gentleness that surpassed the physical realm. The quiet acknowledgment of concern in Will's eyes lingered in Hannibal's thoughts, creating a poignant imprint on his consciousness.

As Hannibal retraced the events, his mind fixated on Will's eyes—those pools of blue warmth that seemed to hold a promise of understanding. The memory of Will's gaze, the comforting

presence of someone who cared, resonated within Hannibal's chest. The rhythmic beat of his heart seemed to synchronize with the whispered cadence of Will's name.

Yet, beneath the surface of burgeoning affection, a subtle undercurrent of fear gnawed at Hannibal's consciousness. The mountains, a vast expanse of beauty and peril, harbored dangers that loomed ominously. The very wilderness that drew them together also threatened to tear them apart.

Hannibal's heart, now entwined with the fear of losing Will, pulsed with an intensity that transcended reason. The vulnerability he had carefully concealed for years now surfaced, an unwelcome companion that whispered of the potential for devastation.

The fear of affection, an emotion that had the power to build bridges and dismantle walls, weighed heavily on Hannibal. He grappled with the realization that his growing fondness for Will might become a double-edged sword, capable of both healing and hurting.

In the solitude of his tent, Hannibal found himself at a crossroads. The echoes of affection reverberated through his being, confronting him with a choice. To embrace the vulnerability of connection, despite the looming dangers, or to retreat into the safety of detachment.

The next day dawned over the mountains. Will and Hannibal, having weathered the challenges of the previous night, found themselves on the mountainside once more, the whispering wind carrying the promise of a new day.

They crouched side by side, the sheep grazing peacefully in the distance, a serene backdrop to the unfolding scene. Hannibal, his shotgun cradled in his arms, surveyed the landscape with a focused intensity. Will, beside him, watched in anticipation, the thrill of the hunt sparking excitement in his eyes.

Hannibal's eyes narrowed as he spotted movement in the distance – a deer, gracefully meandering through the landscape. The tension in the air grew palpable as Hannibal aimed

the shotgun, his focus unwavering. Will held his breath, the world around them momentarily frozen in anticipation.

The blast echoed through the mountains, the sound reverberating against the rocky expanse. Will's eyes widened in delight as he witnessed the bullet find its mark, the deer's body swaying and staggering before succumbing to the impact. A cry of triumph escaped Will's lips, and he couldn't contain his excitement.

"Damn, Lecter, you nailed it!" Will exclaimed, his enthusiasm contagious as he pushed Hannibal excitedly.

Hannibal, however, maintained a composed demeanor, pushing Will back with a subtle smirk. "I am tired of you missing all your shots," he remarked, a hint of teasing in his voice.

Will laughed, the sound echoing through the mountains. "Hey, I hit something once in a while!"

Hannibal rolled his eyes, a playful glint in his gaze. Will, undeterred, leaned close to him, their shoulders brushing. "We better get back," he suggested, the prospect of fresh game adding to the buoyant atmosphere.

As they turned to make their way down the mountainside, Will couldn't resist one last playful shove. Hannibal chuckled, the camaraderie between them growing with each shared victory. Will gazed up at Hannibal, his eyes reflecting the joy of the moment, and a warm smile played on his lips.

Will dismounted his horse with a sense of exhaustion etched into his features. He sauntered towards the campsite, the weariness of his long trip from the mountain evident in his every step. The rhythm of his complaints began before he even reached the log where Hannibal sat.

"Damn, that trip from the mountain to camp feels like a never-ending journey," Will grumbled, the landscape bearing witness to his discontent.

Hannibal, seated on the log, observed Will's approach with a knowing expression. As Will plopped down beside him, the litany of grievances continued, a cascade of complaints about the everyday schedule, the sheep, and the nightly chore of checking for coyotes.

"I swear," Will muttered, his frustration evident, "I don't see why I gotta spend the night playing watchdog for damn coyotes. It ain't right."

Hannibal remained silent, allowing Will to voice his discontent. The campfire crackled between them, casting flickering shadows on the ground as Will leaned against the log, looking up at the endless sky.

"I mean, seriously," Will continued, "boss has no right to make me do that. Ain't my fault if a coyote wants to have some lamb chops for dinner."

Hannibal nodded, acknowledging Will's grievances without uttering a word. The silence between them invited more complaints, more frustrations, as if the wilderness itself were a receptacle for Will's discontent.

"You know," Hannibal finally spoke, his voice calm, "we can switch. I would not mind being up there."

Will blinked in surprise, the monotony of his complaints momentarily disrupted. "Switch?" he echoed, considering the proposition. "You mean you'd be okay doing this shit?"

Hannibal nodded again, a faint smile playing on his lips. "I would not mind. Besides, it is a different view from up there."

A spark of realization lit up in Will's eyes. "Well, hell," he exclaimed, "if you're offering, I'd be happy to switch. But fair warning, I'm terrible at cooking."

Hannibal chuckled, a rich sound that echoed in the air. "I'm sure we can manage. You might surprise me with your culinary skills."

Will grinned, the weight of his complaints lifting as the prospect of a change presented itself. "Alright then, Lecter. Tomorrow, we'll switch. Just don't expect anything fancy from me. I can use a can opener, though."

Hannibal smirked, the understanding between them solidifying as the sun cast its golden glow on the mountainside.

The sun hung high in the sky as Will sat fiddling with a can. The rhythmic clinking echoed through the air as he worked, the mundane task providing a backdrop to the unfolding scene.

His attention, however, was not on the can in his hands but on Hannibal, who sat nearby. The air was warm, prompting Hannibal to be shirtless, revealing wiry muscles and a sprinkle of hair on his chest. Will's gaze lingered, captivated by the play of sunlight on Hannibal's skin.

He bit his lip, averting his eyes when he felt Hannibal's gaze meet his. Clearing his throat, Will tried to focus on the task at hand, feigning nonchalance as he continued to fiddle with the can.

Hannibal, seemingly unaware of the distraction he posed, began recounting his day on the mountain. "I shot a coyote up there," he said, the casual statement not enough to pull Will's attention from the captivating sight before him.

Will nodded along, his responses automatic, not really listening to Hannibal's words. The can in his hands became a secondary concern as his eyes trailed over the contours of Hannibal's torso. The air seemed to hum with an unspoken tension as Will fought to keep his focus.

A sudden curse escaped Will's lips as he felt beans explode onto his hand.

"Damn it," Will muttered, shooting a quick glance at Hannibal. "These damn cans are impossible."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, his expression a mix of amusement and curiosity. "Are you alright, Will?"

Will, flustered by both the spilled beans and the shirtless distraction, mumbled something incoherent. He fumbled with the can, attempting to salvage what remained of its contents.

As water cascaded over him, Hannibal's mind, like a wandering spirit, found its way back to Will. His mental canvas painted vivid images: the wet curls that adorned Will's head after a bath, the glistening sheen of his skin as he toiled in the sunlight, cutting wood for the fire. A tingling sensation in Hannibal's lower body stirred, a physical response he attempted to suppress with a self-directed chide.

The memory of Will's touch lingered in the recesses of Hannibal's consciousness, a yearning that defied rationality. The tenderness bestowed upon him on the night he got hurt echoed through his senses, leaving an indelible mark on his desires.

In the quiet solitude of the creek, Hannibal wrestled with conflicting emotions. He acknowledged the longing for Will's touch, an undeniable craving that brushed against the boundaries of propriety. The internal chiding, a feeble attempt at self-restraint, echoed in the depths of his thoughts.

Yet, Hannibal knew the unspoken truth—he yearned for something he believed he could not have. The complexity of desire tangled with societal norms and self-imposed limitations, creating a tumultuous landscape within his mind.

With a resigned sigh, Hannibal stepped out of the creek, the water droplets clinging to his skin like liquid jewels. His clothes, bundled in his arms, became both shield and invitation as he walked back to camp, bare and unguarded.

The deliberate act of nudity carried a subtle message—an invitation for eyes to linger, a silent tease aimed at the one who occupied Hannibal's thoughts. He yearned for Will's gaze, the acknowledgment of desire that danced on the periphery of their connection.

As he traversed the distance between the creek and camp, Hannibal's heart echoed with anticipation.

Will sat on a log, knife in hand, engaged in the task of peeling a potato. A cigarette dangled from his lips, wisps of smoke curling into the still air.

As he focused on the task at hand, the subtle sounds of the wilderness enveloped him — the rustle of leaves, the distant murmur of the creek, and the gentle breeze that played with the flames.

Behind him, the soft rustle of clothing reached his ears, accompanied by the occasional clink of a buckle. He fought the urge to turn around, knowing Hannibal stood there, naked, changing his clothes after bathing in the creek. The knowledge sent a subtle ripple through the air, a shift in the unspoken dynamics that bound them.

Will gripped the knife a bit tighter, his cigarette bobbing in his mouth. He fought against the curiosity that tugged at the edges of his consciousness, resisting the urge to steal a glance. Instead, he kept his eyes trained on the potato, the monotonous task providing a shield against the tension.

He could sense Hannibal's presence behind him, the awareness of his naked form lingering in the air like a silent whisper. The image of water cascading down Hannibal's skin threatened to intrude into Will's thoughts, and he cursed himself inwardly.

"Damn it," he muttered under his breath, his cheeks growing warm. He berated himself for the involuntary images that flickered in his mind, the distraction from the task at hand.

The peeling of the potato became a deliberate focus, a grounding force against the currents of tension swirling around the campsite. Will felt the weight of Hannibal's presence, the subtle shift in the atmosphere that neither acknowledged.

The day unfolded where Will and Hannibal sat by the fire. Will couldn't help but smirk at Hannibal, his eyes glinting mischievously. "You like rodeo, Lecter?" he teased.

Hannibal looked up from his food, a contemplative expression in his dark eyes. "No," he replied simply. "I do not see the point."

Will chuckled, taking a bite of his own food. "Well, the point is money," he retorted. "Big winnings if you can stay on a bull for eight seconds."

Hannibal nodded, conceding the practicality of the argument. "True," he admitted between bites, his gaze meeting Will's.

Will leaned back, taking a sip of his whiskey, the firelight casting a warm glow on their faces. "My old man, he was a bullrider. Popular in his day," Will began, a hint of nostalgia in his voice. "But he kept secrets to himself, never taught me anything. Never once came to see me ride."

As Will spoke, he stared into the flames, the crackling embers mirroring the flicker of memories dancing in his eyes. He poured more whiskey into his cup, the liquid amber reflecting the tales untold.

"You got any siblings?" Will asked, his gaze shifting to Hannibal.

Hannibal hesitated for a moment, a flicker of something in his eyes before he replied, "I had a sister, Mischa."

Will raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "Mischa, huh? Tell me about her."

Hannibal's eyes softened, and he began to speak, his voice carrying the weight of memories. "Mischa was my younger sister. I tried my best to raise her, but fate had other plans for us."

He delved into stories about Mischa, painting a vivid picture of her presence in his life. He spoke of her laughter, her curiosity, and the way she found joy in the simplest things. Hannibal's words wove a tapestry of a sister loved and lost, and as he spoke, the fire seemed to flicker in sympathy with the emotions laid bare.

"She loved animals, especially cats," Hannibal continued, a distant smile playing on his lips. "We had many cats back then. Mischa used to feed them. She had a way with them, as if she spoke their language."

Will listened intently, the crackling of the fire punctuating the moments of silence between Hannibal's stories. The wilderness stood as a silent witness to the unraveling tales, the embers of the fire reflecting the warmth of shared revelations.

"Fate had other plans," Hannibal concluded, a somber note in his voice. "Mischa's life was cut short, and I have carried the weight of that loss ever since."

Will nodded in understanding, the bond between them deepening in the shadows cast by the fire.

Will lounged, a smirk playing on his lips as he observed Hannibal across the flames.

"You know, Lecter," Will said, raising an eyebrow, "that's the most I've heard you speak in two weeks."

Hannibal met Will's gaze, a smile playing on his lips. The subtle exchange sent a skip through Will's heart, a spark of connection that seemed to dance in the firelight.

"It is the most I've spoken in a year," Hannibal admitted, his eyes holding a depth that hinted at untold stories.

Will laughed, the sound echoing in the air. "Well, ain't this a special occasion then?" he teased, the lightheartedness permeating the space between them.

Hannibal laughed, a rare display of amusement. The intimacy of the moment hung in the air like the scent of wood smoke. As the fire crackled, Will's impulsive spirit took over.

"Yeehaw!" Will shouted, jumping up and starting to prance around Hannibal, a wild grin on his face.

Hannibal sighed, a bemused expression on his face. "Will, what on earth are you doing?"

Will continued his exuberant display, screaming out like a rodeo announcer. "Ladies and gentlemen, we got a real cowboy here!"

Hannibal laughed. Will, caught up in the moment, clattered into a stack of pots, sending them tumbling to the ground. He dropped to the floor with a laugh, the unbridled joy of the moment consuming him.

Hannibal shook his head, smiling at the spectacle before him. "You are quite the character, Will."

Will, still sprawled on the ground, grinned up at Hannibal. "Damn right I am."

Will took a contemplative puff from his cigarette, the tendrils of smoke swirling into the night. The silence hung between them like a shroud, inviting the unspoken and the profound.

"My ma, she believed in the Pentecost," Will finally broke the quiet, his voice carrying the weight of memories.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, a subtle curiosity in his gaze. "Pentecost? An interesting choice of faith."

Will chuckled dryly. "I don't really understand it. She used to speak in tongues, dance like she was possessed. Always made me uncomfortable."

Hannibal smiled, a glint of amusement in his eyes. "Pentecostals believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues being one of them. It's a way of connecting with the divine."

Will scoffed, the bitterness evident in his tone. "Well, I never felt very connected."

Hannibal leaned back, the firelight flickering across his features. "Religion is a complex matter, Will. It's about finding meaning, purpose, and, for some, solace."

Will shot a pointed look at Hannibal. "Men like us, we're probably marching straight off to hell, aren't we?"

Hannibal's smile remained, his gaze steady. "Speak for yourself, Will."

Will rolled his eyes, the exchange a familiar dance between them. The crackling of the fire mirrored the simmering tension, the understanding that lingered in the night.

The night draped itself over the campsite like a heavy blanket, the stars scattered across the vast expanse of the sky. Will and Hannibal lay side by side, the remnants of whiskey buzzing in their veins as the campfire crackled nearby.

Hannibal stirred, his movements a bit unsteady as he tried to stagger to his feet. "I will go check on the sheep," he announced, determination in his eyes.

Will, equally buzzed, shot up beside him. "Nah, Lecter, don't bother. It's too late for those sheep anyway."

Hannibal, undeterred, began to crawl across the ground toward the sheep. Will watched, a bemused expression on his face. "You can hardly stand, and it's too damn late. They'll be fine until morning."

Hannibal scoffed, his voice slightly slurred. "I will manage."

Will shook his head, the alcohol lending a wobble to his movements. "You're gonna freeze your ass off."

Hannibal paused, looking back at Will with a glint of amusement in his eyes. "Then get me an extra blanket," he requested, a smirk playing on his lips.

Will sighed, giving in to Hannibal's stubbornness. "Fine, but I swear, you're a damn mule sometimes."

As Will stumbled over to grab an extra blanket, he tried to convince Hannibal to reconsider. "Just get in the tent, Lecter. It's warm in there."

Hannibal shook his head, determined to sleep outside. "I will be fine."

Will rolled his eyes, muttering under his breath about the stubbornness of certain people. He handed Hannibal the extra blanket, a resigned expression on his face.

"Your loss," Will quipped, his words laced with a teasing tone.

Hannibal smirked, spreading the blanket on the ground. "I will manage, Will. Go and sleep."

With a final shake of his head, Will retreated to his tent, the flap rustling as he entered. "Stubborn ass," he muttered to himself, the whiskey-fueled night settling into a quiet rhythm.

The rhythmic whimpering and groans outside his tent reached his ears, pulling him from the realm of dreams into the chill of the night.

Furrowing his brow, Will shot up, his gaze fixed on the source of the commotion. There, just outside the tent, he found Hannibal shivering violently, the cold Wyoming air biting at him.

Rolling his eyes, Will couldn't suppress a grumble. "Damn it, Lecter. Get in the damn tent."

He watched as Hannibal, clearly affected by the cold, staggered toward the tent. Will's annoyance softened as he observed Hannibal's struggle. Despite his gruff exterior, Will couldn't ignore the fact that Hannibal was, indeed, human and vulnerable to the elements.

"Finally," Will muttered as Hannibal managed to crawl into the tent. The air outside was cold, but inside the tent, it held a residual warmth from the night's fire.

Hannibal turned on his side, his shivering gradually subsiding as the tent offered a shield from the chill. Will, sitting beside him, felt a strange mixture of irritation and concern.

His heart raced, not just from the cold air but from the proximity of Hannibal beside him. The tent, once a solitary refuge, now held a guest, and Will couldn't deny the flutter of something unfamiliar stirring within him.

Will's breathing slowed, a deliberate effort to match the rhythm of slumber. He watched intently as Hannibal, still stirred by the cold, gradually succumbed to the embrace of sleep. The rise and fall of Hannibal's chest became a steady lull, and only then did Will dare to move.

With a calculated calmness, Will extended his hand, fingers trembling slightly as he navigated the small space. He took Hannibal's arm, gently wrapping it around himself. The moment hung in the air, the weight of possibilities unfolding in the darkness of the tent.

Suddenly, Hannibal shot up, his eyes wide open, and Will mirrored the abrupt movement, both of them staring at each other in the hushed confines of the tent. The silence enveloped them, broken only by the soft rustle of the tent fabric in the breeze.

Will, breaking the silence, reached out and pulled Hannibal closer, shushing him with a tender hush. The coolness of the air was replaced by the warmth of shared breaths, the quiet acknowledgment of a connection that defied the norms of their rugged existence.

In a subtle shift, Will removed his jacket, the cool air kissing his exposed skin. He nuzzled their noses together, the intimacy of the moment hanging in the air like the scent of pine. Hannibal, his eyes searching for answers, asked the question that lingered in the stillness.

"What are you doing, Will?"

Will, his gaze unwavering, breathed out slowly. "Warmin’ up."

He cupped Hannibal's face, his thumb tracing the contours of Hannibal's cheek. The tent seemed to hold its breath, a cocoon of vulnerability and unspoken desires. Will, trusting in the quiet understanding that passed between them, moved to unbuckle his belt.

Hannibal lay beside Will, the glow of the fire outside casting a warm hue upon their entwined figures. His gaze lingered on Will's sleeping face, a tableau of tranquility and vulnerability.

As he traced the contours of Will's features with his eyes, Hannibal's thoughts meandered through the intricacies of the night they had shared. The way Will had listened, with genuine care, as Hannibal spoke of Mischa—a topic shrouded in the shadows of his past, a part of himself he had seldom revealed. Will's understanding and acceptance resonated in the quiet space between them.

Hannibal longed to pull Will closer, to feel the reassuring warmth of his body against his own. The night had been a canvas painted with shared pleasures and whispered confessions. Will, in moments of ecstasy, embodied a beauty akin to Botticelli's paintings—a delicate fusion of angelic features and human desire.

Yet, as the tendrils of post-intimacy serenity settled, a sudden realization gripped Hannibal with an unexpected force. He acknowledged, with a fierceness that bordered on panic, that he was falling for Will. The delicate dance of affection that had woven its threads around them was evolving into a sentiment that transcended the boundaries Hannibal had erected around his heart.

The weight of beauty, in the form of Will Graham, settled heavily upon Hannibal's consciousness. The fear of losing what had become a beautiful and integral part of his life burgeoned within him. The prospect of falling in love, of allowing Will to claim a stake in his heart, ignited a conflict within Hannibal.

A tumultuous sea of emotions churned beneath the surface, the fear of abandonment mingling with the blossoming tendrils of affection. Will, as the beautiful thing that had entered Hannibal's life, carried with him the potential to both illuminate and cast shadows.

Hannibal grappled with the paradox of desire and the looming threat of loss. The fragile equilibrium they had cultivated faced an uncertain future, as the silent pact between them grew more complex with each passing moment.

Will stirred inside the tent, a slight soreness and a telltale limp accompanying the signs of a night that defied the norms of his usual existence. But as he rose, the smile on his face spoke volumes — a testament to the uncharted territory of connection he had willingly ventured into.

The morning air held a crispness that mirrored the clarity in Will's mind. Will, embracing the lingering echoes of the night, stepped out into the morning with a newfound lightness (and limp) in his step.

His gaze, searching the campsite, settled on Hannibal, who stood beside his horse, a vision of untamed beauty against the backdrop of the wilderness. Will marveled at the sight, the morning sun casting a warm glow on Hannibal's features. A sense of vulnerability washed over Will as he approached, the remnants of the night's connection lingering in his gaze.

"Hannibal," Will greeted, the word carrying the weight of unspoken emotions.

Hannibal, focused on his horse, seemed to ignore Will's presence. A furrow formed on Will's brow, a subtle pang of panic taking root. The vulnerability of the morning after contrasted with the intimacy of the night before, and Will's bottom lip trembled slightly.

"Hannibal," he repeated, his voice holding a note of urgency.

Finally, Hannibal turned his gaze toward Will, his eyes revealing little emotion. The silence between them stretched.

"I'll see you for supper," Will mumbled, the words a hasty retreat from the vulnerability that threatened to engulf him.

Hannibal nodded, a gesture that held neither warmth nor coldness. Without a word, he mounted his horse, the creature stirring beneath him as they prepared to ride off. The sight of Hannibal, stoic and distant, triggered a pang of uncertainty in Will's chest.

As Hannibal rode off into the expanse, Will lingered in the campsite, the morning sun casting long shadows. The soreness in his limbs served as a reminder of the shared intimacy, and Will couldn't help but smile, a complex interplay of emotions etched on his features.

The mountains unfolded before Hannibal as he rode on his horse, the landscape weaving a tapestry of rugged beauty. The whispers of the wind through the pines and the rhythmic hoofbeats beneath him were drowned out by the cacophony of his internal turmoil.

Images of Will's face, etched with fear and confusion from that morning, haunted Hannibal's thoughts like relentless specters. A weight of guilt pressed upon him, threatening to carve permanent shadows in the recesses of his conscience. He knew he had been stubborn, a willful architect of their shared silence.

The guilt was a torrent, threatening to spill over into tears. Hannibal, a man who had mastered the art of control, found himself on the precipice of an emotional storm. He yearned to weep for the pain he had inflicted on Will, a pain born of his own fear and inadequacy.

His mind wandered to the undeniable beauty that was Will Graham—those striking blue eyes, the softness of his creamy skin that had ignited a yearning Hannibal could no longer suppress. The dichotomy of his own actions, pushing away the very source of his longing, confounded Hannibal. How could he, in one breath, fear the loss of Will and, in the next, be the architect of his own solitude?

As he rode deeper into the mountains, the realization struck Hannibal with a force that left him breathless. Will, in all his complexities and contradictions, held Hannibal's heart in an

unyielding grip. The fear of vulnerability, of admitting the depth of his affections, had driven Hannibal to play a dangerous game of push and pull.

The mountainous terrain mirrored the tumult within Hannibal—a landscape of highs and lows, peaks and valleys that mirrored the undulating journey of his emotions. The need to turn back, to return to Will and unravel the shadows that threatened to shroud their connection, surged within him with an unbridled force.

Yet, fear lingered like a stubborn fog, clouding Hannibal's judgment. Fear of exposing the depth of his emotions, fear of the vulnerability that came with letting someone in. The realization, however, cut through the fog with clarity—Will possessed his heart wholly, a truth that could no longer be denied.

He yearned to know Will on a profound level, to listen to the cadence of his heart, to feel the warm breath that whispered secrets against Hannibal's skin.

The craving to gaze into those azure eyes, to witness the flutter of Will's lashes like delicate butterflies against his own, overwhelmed Hannibal.

With an urgency born of need, Hannibal steered his horse around, retracing the trail he had carved through the mountains.

As the horse's hooves beat a rhythm against the mountainous terrain, Hannibal felt the pull of destiny—the magnetic force drawing him back to the one who held the key to his heart.

Will lay on the grassy slope, the sun warming his skin as he gazed out at the flock of sheep scattered across the mountainside. The rhythmic bleating of the sheep and the soft rustle of the wind created a backdrop to the complex thoughts swirling in Will's mind.

In the distance, the sound of hooves approached, and Will's heart quickened. He watched as Hannibal bounded up the mountain with his horse, a vision of strength against the landscape.

Hannibal dismounted and came to sit beside Will, the two of them sharing the same stretch of grass beneath the vast sky.

For a while, neither of them spoke. The silence hung in the air, pregnant with unspoken words and the weight of the night that had altered the dynamics of their relationship. Will's mind raced with thoughts of whether he had irrevocably changed the fragile connection that had formed between them.

Finally, unable to bear the weight of the silence any longer, Will took a deep breath. "It's nobody's business but ours," he said, his voice carrying a mix of defiance and vulnerability.

Hannibal spoke, his words carried by the mountain wind. "I am afraid of what I feel, Will. More afraid of losing it."

Will turned to face Hannibal, their eyes locking in a shared vulnerability. "You won't lose it," Will asserted, the conviction in his voice unwavering.

Hannibal looked at Will, his gaze probing, searching for the nuances in Will's expression. After a moment of consideration, he nodded, a subtle smile playing on his lips. The tension in the air began to lift as Hannibal's smile reached his eyes, a silent affirmation that eased the knots in Will's stomach.

Hannibal shifted, his hand moving to run through Will's hair with a tenderness that sent a flutter through Will's chest. The simple gesture held a complexity of emotions — a silent acknowledgment of the uncharted territory they had ventured into.

"What are we?" Hannibal asked, his voice soft, carrying a hint of curiosity.

Will shrugged, the grass beneath him tickling his back. "It doesn't matter."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, his gaze steady on Will's. "Doesn't it?"

Will turned his head to look at Hannibal, their eyes locking in a shared moment of understanding. "No," he replied. "It doesn't. What matters is now."

The night draped the campsite in shadows, the glow of the fire casting a warm embrace over the tent. Will, rising without his shirt, watched as Hannibal entered, a vision of untamed beauty in the flickering light. The play of shadows accentuated Hannibal's sharp cheekbones, creating an ethereal glow that captivated Will's gaze.

Moving closer, Will cupped Hannibal's face with a tenderness that spoke volumes. His eyes traced the contours of Hannibal's features, the beauty of the boy before him unraveling in the dance of firelight. Will marveled at the subtle nuances, the sharp lines that defined Hannibal's uniqueness.

"You're beautiful," Will murmured, his voice carrying the weight of admiration.

Hannibal, averting his gaze, seemed to shrink under the intensity of Will's stare. Will's heart bloomed with a mixture of affection and desire as he moved closer, the warmth of their connection melting the barriers that lingered between them.

In the soft glow of the fire, Will's eyes fixated on Hannibal's lips. The longing in his gaze spoke of a desire that transcended the boundaries of words. Hannibal, sensing the invitation, met Will's eyes briefly before averting his gaze again.

Unable to resist, Will leaned in, his lips brushing against Hannibal's. It was a tender kiss, a whisper of shared emotions. Hannibal, lightly pulling away, created a delicate dance of proximity and retreat.

Undeterred, Will pursued, his heart pounding in his chest. The night seemed to hold its breath as their lips finally met in a kiss. Hannibal's response, the softness of his lips against Will's, made the world around them blur into a dizzying haze.

"It's alright," Will whispered, his voice a gentle reassurance.

Guiding Hannibal to move back, Will cradled him in his arms. The tender embrace was a silent declaration of acceptance, a bridge between the desires that had lingered between them. Will kissed Hannibal's forehead, the act carrying a weight of intimacy that went beyond the physical.

As the fire crackled beside them, Will, overcome with a surge of emotions, moved to straddle Hannibal. Their lips met again, the tenderness of the kiss echoing the quiet affirmation of connection.

Will and Hannibal lay bare in the confines of the tent. Hannibal's hands traced gentle patterns along Will's skin, a soft caress that spoke of unspoken promises.

As Hannibal's fingers navigated the landscape of Will's body, he recited Italian poetry in a voice that echoed with the richness of the language. "Tu sei il mio sogno," Hannibal murmured, the words carrying a melody that lingered in the quiet space of the tent. "You are my dream."

Will, his eyes locked onto Hannibal's, sighed in contentment. "Say more," he whispered, the longing in his voice a quiet plea.

"Sei il mio amore eterno. You are my eternal love," Hannibal continued, the Italian phrases cascading like a gentle stream.

Will, mesmerized by the cadence of Hannibal's voice, smiled. "Your accent makes everythin' sound beautiful," he admitted, a note of admiration in his tone.

Hannibal, his fingers never ceasing their gentle exploration, leaned in to kiss Will's forehead. "And you, dear Will, are the epitome of beauty," he confessed, his words a soft affirmation.

Encouraged by the warmth of the moment, Hannibal began to share stories about his younger sister, Mischa. The tent became a sanctuary of shared memories as Hannibal painted vivid pictures with his words.

"I used to paint her portraits," Hannibal revealed, the nostalgia evident in his voice. "She had a way of capturing the essence of life, even in the stillness of a painting."

Will, captivated by the glimpses into Hannibal's past, listened with rapt attention. "Tell me more," he urged, his fingers gently playing with Hannibal's chest hair.

Hannibal, his gaze fixed on the memories that unfolded in his mind, began to narrate in a soft cadence. "Mischa loved the sea. I would paint her against the backdrop of crashing waves, the salt-laden air clinging to her hair like a lover's touch."

The tenderness in Hannibal's storytelling resonated in the confined space of the tent. Will, his heart swelling with a mixture of emotions, marveled at the depth of the connection they were forging.

Yet, amidst the intimacy, Will couldn't ignore the lingering mystery surrounding Hannibal's family's fate. A silent hope hung in the air — a desire to one day unravel the secrets that Hannibal held close to his heart.

Will, his fingers curling in Hannibal's chest hair, couldn't help but express the depth of his newfound emotions. "I want to know everythin’ about you," he confessed, the words a whisper against the night.

Hannibal, meeting Will's gaze with a soft smile, acknowledged the bond that blossomed between them. "And I, you," he replied, his voice carrying a promise that echoed in the quietude of the tent.

Will and Hannibal found themselves engaged in a playful bout of wrestling. Laughter echoed through the air as the two boys tussled on the ground.

Will, his laughter a melody in the mountain breeze, teased Hannibal as they rolled in the dirt. The playful banter added to the carefree atmosphere, the weight of their responsibilities momentarily forgotten in the joy of the moment. As the wrestling match unfolded, the wilderness seemed to embrace their shared laughter, a testament to the territory of their connection.

Amidst the laughter, Will found himself on top of Hannibal, his raised brows conveying a playful challenge. The air crackled with a mixture of adrenaline and affection as Hannibal, a mischievous glint in his eyes, nipped at Will's forearm. The playful exchange escalated, each movement accompanied by raucous laughter that echoed through the mountains.

However, the carefree atmosphere took an unexpected turn when Will's playful swing accidentally connected with Hannibal's face. The realization of the unintended blow sent a wave of panic through Will, and he immediately withdrew, apologizing profusely as he gathered Hannibal into his arms.

To his surprise, Hannibal laughed, a hearty sound that echoed through the mountains. Will, puzzled by the unexpected response, pulled back to gauge Hannibal's reaction. The sun cast speckled patterns of light on Hannibal's face and shirt, where blood mingled with the dirt from their playful tussle.

As Will gazed into Hannibal's eyes, the realization struck him like a bolt of lightning — he loved this boy. The emotions swirled within him, defying easy definition or expression. Will found himself at a loss for words, the intensity of his feelings rendering language inadequate.

Unable to articulate the depth of his emotions, Will abandoned words altogether. The mountainside, a silent witness to their connection, seemed to hold its breath as Will kissed Hannibal with a fervor that transcended spoken language. The harshness of the kiss conveyed a raw and unfiltered truth — a truth that needed no verbal affirmation.

In the aftermath of the impromptu wrestling match, Will and Hannibal lay entangled on the mountainside, the echoes of their laughter mingling with the gentle rustle of the breeze. Dirt and blood painted a unique tableau on Will and Hannibal's faces.

Will, a playful grin on his face, traced his hands over Hannibal's features, smearing the mingled remnants of dirt and blood.

As Will's fingers explored Hannibal's face, his eyes widened with a sudden revelation. The laughter faded, replaced by a quiet intensity that hung between them. Will, caught in the moment, blurted out, "Come with me."

Hannibal, tilting his head with curiosity, inquired about the destination. Will, his expression earnest, shook his head. "Anywhere," he replied, his voice carrying a weight of determination.

With an air of urgency, Will expressed a desire for a different life, a life shared with Hannibal. "We can have a nice life, a real good life," he exclaimed, the breeze carrying the fervor of his words. "Live someplace of our own. Maybe fix up my parents' ranch, or find a new place. I don't care. I just want to be with you."

The territories of their connection seemed to expand in that moment, the prospect of a shared future unfolding like an unexplored landscape. The Wyoming mountains held the echoes of a question that hung in the air — a question that transcended the boundaries of time and place.

Hannibal, his gaze locked onto Will's, seemed to absorb the weight of the proposition. The quietude of the mountainside amplified the unspoken understanding that lingered between them, the complexities of their connection weaving a tapestry of possibilities.

Will, caught in the momentum of his emotions, found himself unable to stop talking..

“Y'know, Hannibal,” Will's voice, thick with his accent, wove through the mountain air. "I've never felt like this before. I can't put it into words, but it's like every beat of my heart is screamin’ your name."

Hannibal, his eyes fixed on Will's, listened intently as the floodgates of Will's emotions opened.

"I look at you, and it's like I'm seein' the whole damn universe in your eyes," Will continued, his words carrying the weight of an uncharted confession. "I never thought I'd find someone who made me feel this alive."

Hannibal, his expression a canvas of understanding, smiled in response. The sun cast a warm glow on their entangled forms, creating a cocoon of intimacy where words became the bridge between desires.

Hannibal, a soft smile playing on his lips, responded in kind. "Will, you are the most captivating part of my life," he confessed. "Your laughter is a melody, and your vulnerability is a masterpiece. I have never met someone who challenges me, who makes me question everything I thought I knew."

Will's heart swelled at Hannibal's words, a symphony of emotions playing out in the quietude of the mountainside.

As Hannibal cupped Will's face in his hands, their gazes locked in a silent covenant, the air seemed to hum with the promise of tomorrow.

"I don't know where we're goin', Hannibal, but I want you there with me," Will confessed, his voice a quiet plea. "I want to wake up next to you every mornin', share every sunset, and face whatever comes our way, as long as we're together."

Hannibal, his eyes reflecting the unwavering commitment in Will's words, responded with a promise that echoed through the wilderness. "I will follow you anywhere, Will," he declared, his voice carrying a quiet certainty.

With a heart that felt a million sizes too big, Will leaned in and kissed Hannibal, the warmth of their connection mirrored in the lingering caress of their lips. He ran his hand through Hannibal's hair, fingers entwined in the soft strands, as he began to paint a vivid picture of the life he envisioned for them.

"Hannibal," Will began. "I want dogs, big ones, little ones, all of ‘em. I want them to run around our home, keepin’ us company. And you, darlin’, can have all the panting supplies you want."

Hannibal, captivated by Will's enthusiasm, listened with a quiet smile as the tapestry of their shared future unfolded in the mountainside air.

"I was thinkin’," Will continued, his eyes dancing with excitement. "Maybe we'll have sheep of our own, just a small flock. You know, nothing too crazy. And I'll rodeo, Hannibal, never flyin’ off a horse. I'll be the best damn cowboy, and you'll be right there cheerin’ me on."

"And when we're old and grey," Will mused, his eyes glinting with mischief, "we'll argue about the silliest things. Maybe it'll be about who forgot to put the kettle on or who left the gate open. And you know what? It'll be the best kind of arguin’ because we'll have a lifetime of memories to argue about."

The delight in Will's expression grew with each passing word, the weight of the dreams he was articulating lifting his spirit higher and higher.

"We'll have lazy Sunday mornin’s where we'll sip coffee and watch the sunrise. We'll dance in the kitchen, and I'll teach you some moves. Maybe we'll even have a vegetable garden, Hannibal. Fresh tomatoes for our sandwiches."

Hannibal nodded in agreement, his eyes reflecting the joy that Will's words brought him. With a gentle smile, Hannibal leaned in and kissed Will, a silent affirmation of their shared commitment.

"We must watch over the sheep, my love," Hannibal teased, the warmth of his laughter hanging in the breeze. "If we are to leave this mountain and start our life, we need to ensure the safety of our woolly companions."

Will rolled his eyes playfully, a mischievous glint in his gaze. "Oh, come on, Hannibal," he teased back, leaning in for another kiss. "The sheep can take care of themselves for a little while."

The sun hung low in the sky, casting a warm, golden hue over the expansive mountain as Will and Hannibal rode together, their horses dancing in tandem with the rhythm of the wind. The sheep grazed peacefully, a tranquil congregation amid the vast expanse of nature.

Hannibal couldn't help but marvel at the ethereal beauty of the scene—Will's silhouette against the sunlit backdrop, his curls ablaze with the fiery touch of daylight. The angelic visage that had enraptured Hannibal since their paths first crossed unfolded before him, and Hannibal felt a surge of elation, a sensation akin to soaring through the open skies.

As they herded the sheep and ran with their horses, Hannibal's gaze lingered on Will's features—the smattering of freckles across the bridge of his nose, the green speckles that danced in his eyes like emerald constellations, and the radiant brightness of his smile, a beacon that could rival the sun.

A profound realization washed over Hannibal, one that transcended the fear and hesitation that had gripped him earlier. He loved Will Graham with a depth that seemed boundless, a sentiment that had blossomed into an unyielding force. In the heart of the mountains, amid the symphony of nature's whispers, Hannibal embraced the certainty that the risk of loss was a paltry toll to pay for the luminance that Will brought to his world.

Contentment enveloped Hannibal as he rode beside Will, the wind tousling their hair and carrying their laughter through the mountain air. The vibrant tapestry of the world unfolded before them, and Hannibal felt an indescribable connection to the universe—a connection woven with threads of love, shared dreams, and the promise of a future entwined.

In the quietude of the mountains, Hannibal's heart swelled with a profound sense of purpose. He knew, without a shadow of doubt, that he and Will would traverse the world together. Hannibal vowed to take care of Will, just as Will would take care of him. They would find happiness in the simplicity of shared moments and the grandeur of their love, an enduring bond forged amid the majestic peaks and valleys that cradled them.

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